

Newsletter

Blissymbolics
Communication
Foundation

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BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

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The purpose of this newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning the Bliss Symbol System which utilizes visual symbols as a substitute to verbal communication for physically handicapped children without speech.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are available from:

Blissymbolics Communication Foundation
862 Eglinton Avenue East,
Toronto, Ontario. M4G 2L1

ARTICLES for the next newsletter should also be sent to the above address.

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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Here we are with the last issue in the current subscription series. Plans for the next volume are still uncertain. When the details are finalized, notices will be sent to all subscribers. This may well be the last issue with which Lois and I will be involved. We have certainly enjoyed the challenge of producing this newsletter during the past two years but, in all honesty, feel that it has not achieved its original purpose.

Some of you may remember that almost three years ago, a group of symbol instructors met in Toronto and decided that a means by which ideas could be exchanged and controversial issues discussed would be most beneficial to all concerned. This newsletter was created for that purpose. Early enthusiasm produced articles from various centres in North America and we seemed to be well on our way. However, the well has run dry. I now spend much valuable time soliciting material and this results in the majority of articles being weighted in favour of my own interests and concerns. Witness the number of Hamilton articles in this particular issue. This state of affairs is most unsatisfactory and defeats the purpose of the newsletter. The great tragedy is that there are so many marvellous and exciting things taking place in the effort to establish Blissymbolics as a viable means of communication for the non-verbal. When attending workshops and seminars, I am constantly amazed at the new techniques and teaching methods developed by people from all disciplines and geographical areas. If only these people would submit a few lines to us, meaningful exchange would take place and the hundreds of children, with whom we all work collectively, would benefit.

And so I would like to throw out a challenge to YOU. Do you want the newsletter to continue? Do you find it of interest or value? Are you prepared to share your experiences with us? Please write and let us know. Send your comments directly to the B.C.F., or to me at 64 Magnolia Drive, Hamilton, Ontario, L9C 5T2.

It should be pointed out that articles appearing in this newsletter are not to be considered as reports on Blissymbolics Communication Foundation activities and, as such, they present points of view which are not necessarily in keeping with the policy of the Foundation regarding symbol usage. Publications such as the Bulletin, Teaching Guidelines, Syntax Supplement are the vehicles through which the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation will present its position. Hopefully the newsletter will provide a forum for differing points of view and broaden all our perspectives.

Barbara Rush
Editor

AN ARTICLE SUBMITTED FOR THE NEWSLETTER FROM THE BCF

As we reach the final edition of the 1975-76 Newsletter subscription series, we would like to thank Barbara Rush, editor, and Lois Valentic, assistant editor, for their tremendous efforts in getting 4 Newsletters completed and distributed during the past year. While there are many very interesting and exciting programmes emerging across Canada, United States and abroad, Barb and Lois have not always had an abundance of articles to print, as most people get so involved in their programmes that they neglect to record them and submit articles. We thank all those who have submitted articles to share.

The BCF has been very involved in workshops -- past and future. There was a joint beginners BCF-OCCC Workshop held in Toronto in April. Also, the advanced research workshop was held in May where symbol instructors participating in the research gathered to receive and evaluate preliminary findings as well as share their experiences related to symbol instruction. It was a unique experience that was generally reported worthwhile. Since January, BCF has also given workshops and orientation programmes in Pontiac, Michigan; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Dayton, Ohio and West Seneca, New York. The Montreal Resource Centre has held 2 beginners' workshops -- one in French and one in English.

The Ottawa Resource Centre is planning to hold a second workshop July 12th - 14th. For further details contact Mrs. Anne Warrick, Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre, P.O. Box 8469, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9.

The BCF is currently planning a beginners' workshop the week of November 15th in Toronto, and an advanced workshop to be held the week of October 18th also in Toronto.

The BCF is honoured at being asked to give the first British Symbol Workshop (Summer School) July 26th - 31st.

We apologize for having to postpone the distribution of the Bulletin. Work is currently underway for it to be sent out this summer. Indefinite funding has made it impossible for us to define our specific programme objectives for 1976-77. We hope to soon outline our immediate commitments in the first Bulletin. Also in this Bulletin will be information regarding affiliation with the BCF, including subscription to the Newsletter. The Bulletin will also report on the use of Blissymbolics at the Wheelchair Olympics.

There may be various stories circulating regarding the relationship between C.K. Bliss and the BCF. We assure you that we are doing our utmost to act responsibly within the terms of the legal agreement arrived at July 4th, 1975. The task of applying Blissymbolics for the use of non-speaking persons, while maintaining the integrity of the system, is a challenging one. From the recent Advanced Workshop, we know we have the support of many instructors in this difficult undertaking.

We wish you a happy and relaxing summer.

Shirley McNaughton
Barbara Kates

BREAKING THE BARRIERS OF SILENCE

"With the exception of sustaining life itself, nothing that man does is more complex, more important, and more taken for granted than the common act of talking". (P. Newman, 1968)

Man only realizes the importance of speech when he is confronted with those who have specific speech disorders. As an orthopaedic class teacher in Hamilton, I am constantly aware of the academic, social and emotional problems surrounding the Cerebral-Palsied child as a result of his various speech disorders.

I have always been deeply concerned about the non-verbal student who is under constant emotional strain because he is unable to socialize satisfactorily, function orally in an academic manner or even ask for basic needs in a clear organized verbal way. He becomes either the silent "body" in the classroom or the very emotional child who is constantly frustrated by his own silence and inability to become an expressive useful member in the classroom, home or any other aspects of society.

There are those who have had the same concerns for the non-verbal child, and through their endless efforts a new way of talking was established in the early 70's. "Blissymbols" has become an exciting technique which has truly helped to alleviate many of the problems surrounding the lives of thousands. This method of talking has had many positive effects on the total life of so many non-verbal Cerebral-Palsied children that I personally believe that the Bliss Symbol Communication System is the greatest technique to be created and used in Special Education in this century.

I personally became involved with the Bliss System through one of my non-verbal students. Paul, now a thirteen year old, bright-eyed boy, came to my orthopaedic class from the Cerebral Palsy Centre in 1972. He lived a life full of exciting experiences on his farm with an extraordinary family who are respected and admired in the community and he tried vainly to share his vast experiences with me and his classmates. Paul was always alert and interested in all school activities and he constantly yearned to be included in all class discussions. Paul's struggle to communicate became a never ending battle which frequently ended in frustration. He could use a typewriter but his word usage was so poor that he could not express his feelings and thoughts to the satisfaction of himself and others. Picture and wordboards proved fruitless, which only left a very limited form of hand gestures and a few near-distinguishable verbal sounds as his only way of communication. It was becoming very clear that Paul would soon become a sad, frustrated emotional problem.

In the winter of 1974, the Bliss System was formally introduced to Paul and his family. After many discussions, observations and periods of deep thought, Paul's family consented to send Paul back to the Cerebral Palsy Centre in Hamilton where he was to spend one year under the very capable and well-trained hands of Mrs. Barbara Rush, the symbol teacher at the Centre. Paul's reluctance to go back to the C.P. Centre stemmed from the fact that he would have to leave his older friends at Lisgar to go back to a class of younger students at a school from which he had graduated two years before. Such a placement was feared to only add to his frustration and enhance further emotional turmoil.

Paul learned his symbols extremely well and was soon sending me letters in symbols. I quickly realized that I would also have one year to become well-versed in the basic symbol techniques so that I would be able to reinforce Paul's programme when he returned to my class at the end of a year. My training consisted of reading articles and books about the Bliss System, attending Bliss demonstrations and in-service presentations and by returning letters to Paul, using symbols. The letter writing exercises proved to be a most beneficial learning experience for both Paul and myself. Paul would take delight in correcting my letters and giving constructive hints and suggestions for manipulating symbols for my future letters.

Paul's training at the C.P. Centre was extremely successful. In ten months he had mastered 643 symbols and many strategies which enabled him to say almost anything. Paul returned to Lisgar School in the fall of 1975.

As Paul moved down the hall on that first day back at Lisgar, one could sense the air of self-confidence which radiated from his proud face. Teachers and students who had known Paul from his previous Lisgar days were amazed and excited to see how one small board containing many strange symbols could have such an influence on his self-confidence.

Paul's ability to communicate using his symbols has had many positive effects on his academic, emotional and social life. He carries his compact symbol board everywhere and has repeatedly acclaimed that "this is one of the greatest things to ever happen to me".

Through Blissymbols Paul is now able to communicate in all class discussions offering many good ideas and further stimulating a more detailed discussion with his very inquisitive questions. I have been constantly challenging Paul to manipulate various symbols and symbol strategies to develop many ways of expressing himself using good sentence structure. His cognitive ability displayed by such manipulations are surprising and exciting.

Paul's social life at school has improved markedly. He is now able to take part in all social events, expressing his thoughts and feelings to others in a clear manner. One frequently observes Paul sitting on the floor with his board surrounded by other students who are eager to hear what he has to say. During a recent school-wide theme, Paul was thrilled that he was able to take part in so many ways along with other members of his group. (Groups included all students from levels 1-6 and all special classes integrated together to form family groupings.)

As a result of these positive social and academic experiences Paul has gained considerable self-confidence and emotional outbursts resulting from frustration are almost negligible. Paul is constantly receiving positive reinforcement for his accomplishment from everyone he comes in contact with at home, school and the community at large. He is very proud of his Bliss learning accomplishments and is excited that the applications of such learnings have become such a meaningful part of his life.

In an era when education is constantly criticized for its teachings of impractical materials which are not applicable to everyday living, Blissymbols represent an exciting refutation to the argument because of its very practical everlasting life-fulfilling applications.

To reiterate the words of many previous critics, I believe the greatest strength of the Bliss System is that "It is working". The many hundreds of Pauls are now able to express their good ideas and feelings to others in a very organized well-developed manner. Praise be to all of those dedicated people who have not taken speech for granted and whose determination, insight and creativity have broken the barriers caused by the silence and have opened up new exciting avenues of living for many non-verbal people.

Wayne Atanas
Orthopaedic Class Teacher, Hamilton, Ontario.

THE OTTAWA CRIPPLED CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRE

395 Smyth Road,
Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9

in association with

BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

will conduct a

WORKSHOP IN BLISSYMBOLICS

Location: Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre
395 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario

Date: July 7th, 8th, and 9th, 1976

Fee: \$75.00

The Workshop will discuss the following areas:

Orientation, Assessment of the non-verbal child,
Alternate methods of non-verbal communication,
History, Morphology, Structure, and Semantics of Blissymbols,
Teaching Methodology,
Bio-medical engineering - electronic aids and interfacing,
Blissymbols for the mentally retarded,
Parental Involvement,
Observation of and practical experience with non-verbal children.
Summary and discussion.

Workbooks and Teaching Manuals will be provided.

Registration will be limited to 25 persons.

Completed registration forms, with the required fee, should be returned by June 25, 1976. Please make cheques payable to Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre.

Mrs. Anne Warrick

OTTAWA CRIPPLED CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRE

REGISTRATION FORM

WORKSHOP IN BLISSYMBOLICS

July 7th, 8th, 9th, 1976

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER: (Home)

(Business)

My Area of Interest is: Education

Therapy: Speech

Parent

Occupational

Other

Physio

I would appreciate information regarding:

- a) Accommodation
- b) Transportation
- c) Other

I enclose registration fee of \$75.00

Signature _____

THREE DAY ADVANCED WORKSHOP FOR SYMBOL INSTRUCTORS

Working in the same building as the Editor of this Newsletter means that an article of some shape or form finally has to be squeezed from co-workers. Having just attended the Advanced Workshop for Symbol Instructors in Toronto, there no longer seems to be a valid excuse for not putting pen to paper.

This excellent workshop was for those participants involved with the O.C.C.C. Symbol Research Project which began in December, 1974.

For those not familiar with this project, it was a systematic, detailed study of known symbol users compiled by the team at O.C.C.C. The participants' task was to report the symbol users' progress throughout the year to Toronto on a regular basis. The subsequent recordings were compiled and scientifically processed by the team and presented to us at the workshop.

As an introduction, Shirley McNaughton outlined the growth of the symbol population since the research began. This now numbers over 1,000 in North America and Europe. Barb Kates then presented the Preliminary Information Draft Form which gave us detailed results of each section of the report.

It would be too lengthy to be specific, but an overall summation of the results would be that in the symbol users studied, the variable of I.Q. and age have a significant effect on interest in communication.

The format of the three days was a series of presentations by the team members on one topic of the Research - e.g. selection and arrangement of vocabularies, syntax, symbol system, instructional programming, initial selection criteria, etc. These were followed by small group discussions on the topic, and a sharing of ideas and current programmes.

The discussion groups were selected according to the age and I.Q. of the children with whom one was working. It was within these groups that one was really able to gather meaningful ideas that could be usefully implemented into our own settings.

After three intensive days covering all areas and aspects of symbol communication from symbol selection, to instruction to administration, there arose some new exciting ideas and some areas of concern.

Some mutual areas of concern were:

- I lack of funding for materials, adequate staffing and programme.
- II one discipline within a team unable to spread the child's symbol use beyond his or her own area.
- III syntax development
- IV lack of appropriate testing materials for the severely physically handicapped child
- V tranference from symbol usage to reading

A main area of concern and frustration, particularly for the B.C.F. team itself, is in the standardization of symbols. It is not their wish to make the constant changes that occur but they must abide with direct instructions from Mr. Bliss.

Some new ideas also emerged:

I - a summer camp for symbol users is being organized by the Sarnia team

II - a beautifully produced series of symbol slides from the National Film Board will be available in September.

But the overall good news is that symbol use is rapidly expanding, not just in the area of the physically handicapped, but in the area of the mentally retarded child and adult. There are now Resource Centres in Ottawa, Montreal and Sarnia and there is to be a symbol workshop held in England later this year.

An intensive but rewarding three days. A word of praise should be given to Shirley and the team for all the work that went into the preparation and smooth running of the workshop.

The enthusiasm of the team is certainly infectious, and I for one came away with a renewed outlook on my own symbol programme.

Penny Mitton
Kindergarten Teacher
Hamilton, Ontario

SONIC BEEPER

All who have the ability to communicate, not only find this faculty required for conveying thoughts and ideas but also to gain the attention of the prospective listener. The need for an attention getting device for symbol using children at the Hamilton Cerebral Palsy Centre sparked the development of a little gadget called a "Beeper".

Until this time the children in Barbara Rush's symbol class were obtaining her attention by banging on their wheelchair trays. Such banging noises were not always identified by the teacher due to interference from extraneous background noise. The child requiring attention could not be specified immediately until a quick survey was conducted.

The device developed is composed of an activation pad connected via a cable to a simple electronic circuit which drives a sonic beeper. The activation pad is a piece of clear plexiglass measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3" which has a pressure switch at each corner. Clear plexiglass is used so that the child can see the communication board through it.

The pressure switch consists of a machine screw separated from a brass shim plate by a piece of Dr. Scholl's foam. The plexiglass is tapped and countersunk to accommodate the machine screw. When the plexiglass pad is pushed down the foam is compressed and the machine screw comes in contact with the shim. This makes an electrical connection. One wire is soldered to a locking washer on the machine screw and another to the brass shim. The four pressure switches are connected in parallel so that any switch can activate the beeper. The closure of any of the four switches causes a negative going pulse ie. from +9v to 0v to be applied to a Monostable Multivibrator RCA CMOS CD4047AE which automatically turns on a switching transistor allowing current to flow through a sonic beeper. The beeper can be connected to produce three distinctive tones. This facility permits the identification of the child in need of assistance. The beeper sounds for a period depending on the value of R_T and C_T in the circuit. The circuit draws very little power from the 9v radio battery used to power the circuit and drive the beeper. The RCA CMOS Monostable was selected for the circuit since it requires very little power to operate. It can be obtained from Electrosonic Distributors. The Mini-Bleeptone Model 525 is made by C. A. Briggs Company, Cybersonic Division and can be obtained from G.P.R. Research Industries Limited, P.O. Box 2202, Bramalea, Ontario, L6T 3S4. Other components can be obtained from Radio Shack or any other electronics parts distributor including the plastic box for containing the components.

Further information can be obtained by contacting:

Mr. R. Day,
Chedoke Hospitals,
P.O. Box 590,
Biomedical Engineering
Hamilton, Ontario.
L8N 3L6

SYMBOL PAPER

Welcome to the first Bliss symbol paper filled with stories, articles and news written and edited by students on the programme.

Late last year we became aware of the fact that though much had been written about the use of Symbols, there was nothing published in symbols so that the students could communicate with each other.

We presented the idea to the BCF and they thought that it would work so we proceeded to put together our first issue.

We picked an editor from one of our students who was through school and not eligible for any manual jobs that were available in the facility. Next we got our students together to write some stories, not all of them gems but at least many of them showed imagination and their need to express themselves. All of our students were asked to make up stories and we picked the ones that we felt would be suitable for our first issue. Then we went to press putting out our first issue in late December. The response was fair and we got together a mailing list which has been growing ever since so that we give out over two hundred papers each issue.

We have received several stories from other areas who are working in Bliss and they have been included in the further papers which have been distributed. This has been a great boon to encouraging the staff here at the centre and elsewhere to see the functional use of the Programme, to the parents it has been a very positive thing done by their children which is something that they do not get to see often.

The editor of the paper, Russell Cecchini, was asked to go to Toronto to sign a sub-license for the use of the symbols in his publication and while there he had many new experiences that he had not imagined ever doing.

The paper is still being put out every two months (not quite as regular as clockwork), and it is growing larger both in content and in distribution size. It is the first step in tying Symbol users together and I hope that more aids will be developed in this area. To order your SYMBOL PAPER please write to:

SYMBOL PAPER
Bliss Symbol Programme
Rideau Regional Centre
Box 2000,
Smiths Falls, Ontario.

If you would like to see your symbol story in print....send it along.

Hugh Nelson
Smith Falls, Ontario.
